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Old Ewes' Stomach Worms Must Not Result In Horses Being Blemished

By Monte Noelke

MERTZON — While the rest of the Shortgrass Country basked in the July sun with nothing more to worry about than the next drouth, this outfit was busy pulling off a mid-summer sheep gathering exercise.

As the mercury climbed each day to the 100-plus range, my fellow drovers and myself were far out in the bushes, chousing the Boss's ewes and lambs from one thicket to the next.

The purpose of this venture was to doctor the sheep for internal parasites, and we tried to get the flocks in the pen before the sun was sufficiently intense to backlash a magnifying glass. What actually happened was nearly too sad to relate.

From the first morning, we bore a cure that would defy the queen of the Gypsy witch doctors. The wind would die as the sun came peeking over the distant pea ridges. Even before the heat descended upon us, the clatter of the shod horses in the dawn stillness warned the old ewes to start scurrying to their hiding places.

Each daybreak brought the same story. The brush-whacking old sisters would hear us coming and within a few minutes after daylight would be invisible. Shortly afterward, the cowboys could be seen wandering around and through the brush as spiritless as the Monday morning shift in a fog horn factory. By noon they'd have their hat brims turned down, their chins resting on their chests, their eyes focused on the ground. From then until dark the local sewing circle could have out-gathered and out-ridden the whole crew without taking off their thimbles.

The contract sheep doctor was having his troubles, too. Early in the season he had made up his mind that his mild case of ingrown toenails was a major hardship in his profession. He had brooded about the problem until he imagined that his toenail condition should be brought under the scope of some national research foundation. Each time one of his helpers or an old ewe brushed his boot, he would disrupt the whole operation with a stream of heated adjectives. On the last morning of our work, this lay sheep physican really fell to pieces; without apparent reason or warning, he started throwing rocks at a group of riders who were departing to bring him some more sheep.

Of course I couldn't allow that kind of nonsense. Doing a little offhand rock throwing is healthy for youngsters, but as anyone knows who has read the sports pages, an older man can do serious damage to his arm by pitching balls, or rocks or other objects at a high rate of speed. And that was exactly what this hombre was risking when he took pot shots at the cowboys.

So I interfered. In no vague terms, I informed the professional de-wormer that neither the boss nor myself wanted him to be injured while he was on our ranch. I informed him that if he wanted to stone cowboys, he would have to do it on his own time and at some other place.

What, I asked him, if he had misfired and hit one of the boss's horses between the eyes? If he had so much as scratched one of the younger fillies, the combined wealth of

all the sheep· dopers in the world wouldn't have lasted through the first round of court proceedings. For some reason, the sermon worked. He reluctantly stopped hurling boulders and went back to work.

Next July I'm going to conduct this exercise at night. I feel we can do a better job when the moon is full. As to calming the truculent sheep doctor, that is going to take a lot of time and planning. I sincerely hope that his rock-throwing urge has subsided before we need him again.